

9/24/2009

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

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Present: Reynolds Wislow, chair, Eunice Torres, director, Lois Raj, Victoria Oliva, Stefan Cejic, Frank Gatti, Daniel Lee, Kathleen Anderson, and Mohamed Ibrahim (Elgadi).

Agenda:

- Commissioner's Check-in
- Opening/welcome
- Agenda Review/Addition: Kathleen, Mohamed, and Frank added new items to the agenda.
- 1. Last Meeting Minutes Review:

July 16, 2009 Minutes approved with the following corrections: 1) under 8-a spelling of Shafer; 2) under 8-c it's a social justice grant; 3) under 9-a Reynolds is a member and not the chair of the Publicity Committee.

2. Guest Presentations:

The potential new Commissioner to sit on this HRC was not invited due to logistic issues (he is the event coordinator @ Hampshire College. Eunice will be inviting him for next meeting

3. Old Business:

a) Sub-committee reports:

- Race & Class: A group of 15 Amherst High School students meets once a week to have a conversation about race and class. The meeting is facilitated by Kathleen and takes place @ the Parents Ctr room during the C-3 Period Study. Another group, Kathleen reported, will be meeting in the spring (to focus on the same issue?) and will be open to all E-Period Study.
- Writing Group: Frank and Reynolds suggested that this sub-committee to submit few articles to the 12/10 event (Amherst Bulletin; and the school newspapers). Reynolds will contact Professor Joe Wronka (former Commissioner) to be the point person for this task.

- #### b) Darfur Update:
- Mohamed gave an update on the situation in Darfur region and the Sudan. He cautiously welcomed the decrease in violence that reflected in the number of killing (32 in June compared to over 150 early this year). This was possible partially due to the positive pressure from the Obama Admin on the Sudanese regime in Khartoum, and the continuous global movement of solidarity. In a recent presentation by the Darfur coalition of W. Mass

(www.Darfurwm.blogspot.com) the role of Amherst Town was upheld for its role in showing solidarity with the Darfur people. Darfur is the focus of two local events: Children of Darfur Exhibit @ the Amherst Jewish Ctr (9/11-18); and STAND @ UMASS (11/2-16), which will be an event focusing on genocide (Darfur, Cambodia, Holocaust).

Action: Mohamed to write an article about Darfur to the Writing Sub-Committee

- c) Jasson Vassell Case Update: Reynolds shared some information (off the records) on this case that can't be publicly shared right now.
- d) New Chief Police Update: Candidate Scott Livingstone was chosen unanimously by the Search Committee. Eunice noticed with disappointment that the community of color was not invited to the Sworn-in reception. She brought this concern to the Town Manager who apologized to this un-intentional mistake and said that in the near future there will be an open event at the Police Station to welcome the community.
The excuses made of space and time limitation did not make sense. Reynolds to write a letter to the Police Chief on behalf of the HRC.
Kathleen raised a concern about using resources and vehicles of the Police Chief while off duty; and Eunice clarified that it's part of his contract (in case he was called-in and needed to go to work).
- e) ACTV Station/Bill support/Update: Frank will be meeting with Jim Lescault, Executive Director, to get an update for the next meeting.

4. New Business:

- a) Heroes Group Award 2010/Discussion: We need to publicize this Award to the public. Frank will talk to Isaac Ben Ezra to write about what it means to receive this award.
- b) Human Rights Day discussion: Few different events would be organized in the week of the UN International Human Rights Day. * On the evening of Dec. 10th, the HRC will observe the event as usual by reading the Declaration Articles in the Common (all the Commissioners).
* The Community event will be on Sat 12/12 @ the Town Hall (Eunice to reserve the place).
* Amnesty International Club @ ARHS to organize a posters exhibit at the Library (Stefan, Daniel, and Victoria to report next week). * To contact with other human rights groups in the area to participate in the event (Mohamed to contact with other AI chapters)
- c) Amherst 250th Parade: Frank, Stefan, and Mohamed will be walking in the Parade.
Encourage/invite your neighbors and former Commissioners. Mohamed to pick up the HRC banner from Eunice next week

5. Other Business:

- Nomination for HRC Secretary: No volunteers! It was decided, for now, this task to be filled rotationally on a monthly basis. Kathleen volunteered for next month
- Website: Stefan to be the official website designer/builder/maintainer. Mohamed suggested adding a Blog within the page to speed-up the site update. Eunice will follow-up with the Town website person to have Stefan get access to the page.
- No Blood Donation for Gay Men: Mohamed suggested the HRC to start discussion on this controversial ban by the Dept. of Public Health. The issue was brought up recently

by one local human service org (ServiceNet) during their annual Blood Drive. Frank brought to attention that there is no ban on those heterosexuals who sell their blood even though there is more risk in this practice. Reynolds suggested inviting the Town Health Coordinator to inquire about their opinion in this regard.

Action: Mohamed to email reading materials from both sides of the debate.

- Resettlement of Cleared Guantanamo Detainees: A proposed Resolution to the Town Meeting is suggesting that Amherst Town to welcome into the community those cleared Guantanamo detainees and ask the Congress to lift the ban on their releasing to the United States.

Number of the Commissioners raised concerns about this proposed steps from different perspectives. Mohamed will invite the Resolution authors to the next meeting of HRC to explain their viewpoint

- Immigrants Rights Training: Frank suggested that the HRC send one Commissioner to be trained in immigrant rights. The goal is to have the HRC to become a resource center in this area. The training will be conducted by a community organizing group @ AFSC offices in Florence. Frank will be sending more info on the date/time and name of the group.

6. Director's Report:

Eunice reported on one complaint from a resident and she advised him to report to the police to speed up the process.

7. Announcements:

- Discipline Report (compiled by the State) will be presented @ the School Committee meeting on 10/13 *(not sure of this item) who made this announcement?*
- Break & Puppet has a show @ the High school tomorrow (9/25)....Fun and appropriate for all ages (tickets \$5)
- H1N1 Vaccine: Concern was raised that poor people won't get vaccinated because of the cost (\$25). *(who made this announcement?)*

Next Meeting October 15, 2009

Adjournment @ 9:05pm